

ORATION.

Brothers of El Dorado—Ladies and Gentlemen of Placerville:

Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals and forts.

[Longfellow.]

The voice which summons us to the contemplation of the day, is the earnest and yet calm and tranquil voice of benevolence and peace.

The turbulence of war, the surprises of passion, the echos of wild and agitating conflicts, have nothing in common with the kind and placid spirit which now awaits the homage of our philosophy and gratitude.

Like the magic seasons, which affect in silence the mighty changes of nature, unfolding in mute magnificence the emerald leaf and gorgeous blossom, transforming the invisible moisture of night into the sparkling dew-drops of morning, the fleecy clouds of noon, or into that prismatic hand of wonder that writes in hues of inimitable beauties, the promises of God upon the rainbow,—like the reparative currents of vitality that maintain the efflorescence of human health, and repair the injuries of disease,—like the industrial forces that have reared in silent progress those towering and colossal mastadons of vegetation, which proclaim the antiquity of Calaveras and Mariposa, so move those golden chariot wheels of benevolence, whose pinions are lubricated by the pure oil of heart-warmed, God-imbued, Heaven-inspired kindness.

As calmly as the spring of Placerville arrays itself in the delicate and glorious costumes of verdure and flowers, whilst the overlooking, bleak Sierras are reflected in the icy robes of unbroken winter, so calmly, so quietly should we approach the contemplation of the peaceful and noiseless overtures of all organizations for the exercise of Charity and the promotion of Relief.

So may we turn our minds to the consideration of the sacred claims and hallowed relations of Odd Fellowship, whose *Forty-First Birthday* is now being celebrated amidst the congratulations and praises of its leal and lineal membership.

Usually when called upon to write or speak upon the subject of our Order, we have writ-

ten or spoken from the institution, to society, from the center to the circumference, from the sanctum sanctorum of its principles, to the vestibule of its admission; thus traveling, oratorially, from within to the exterior, instead of thinking and speaking from the outside to the inside, from the periphery to the center.

It is quite natural to speak from the fraternity to society. It is luxuriously charming to speak directly from the absolute records of fraternity and benevolence to the lovely and glorious fruits resulting therefrom.

Let us, upon the present occasion, pursue a different plan; let us adopt the exoteric process of traveling by reflection from the outside to the inside, from man and society, to Odd Fellowship and Fraternity, from the necessities of governments, to the sagacious and benevolent fulfillments through the agency of individuals in the bonds of Brotherhood. We will declare but a simple truism, if we say that the primitive condition of mankind was one in which government and laws were not only of most limited development, but most imperfectly understood.

The whole superstructure of government which has ever resulted from man's instinctive fancy for social organization, is but an elaborate work of art, the design of which has been to provide a combination of encouragements and restraints that should in the least degree interfere with those natural rights, privileges and protections with which all men are by nature endowed.

The social feature of the human race, taken in connection with the mental peculiarity that demands association, forced mankind into those gregarious and friendly companionships from which government and laws have sprung up as necessities, whilst art and ingenuity have combined to imbue them with the highest adaptability to the wants and reserved rights of individuals.

The highest aims of government always have been and must ever be, the multiplication of the sources of rational enjoyments and an absolutely equitable protection.

No man will have the temerity to deny these as the chief and leading objects sought for in the formation of governments and the elaboration of laws. No man who ever thinks at

al, who ever reasons upon the simplest proposition, will deny the statement. And whilst we admit, that it requires the mightiest mental capacity for the construction of good governments and equitable laws, it is quite as true and more manifest that the humblest capacity is sufficiently strong to understand their necessity and the objects to be accomplished.

This proposition, which we doubt not is well understood, should be borne in mind whenever reference is made to the progress of authority, by which the perfection of governments and laws is necessarily tested, or, especially when from the overthrows of governments and the revolutions of history, we look to the people for an explanation of the sacrifices and disasters that hang like clouds of melancholy upon the reader's heart.

Whilst we admit that a law-giver should be endowed with the most eminent capacity, that he should have a mind strongly developed and well fortified with useful information, yet we repeat, that the fullest mental organizations which are held as morally responsible, are not only capable of a very clear understanding of the necessities of government and laws, but they are also capable of a quick appreciation of the justice and equity of laws by which they are governed.

Where is the man or woman who does not know the necessity that suggests the manufacture of suitable vessels for conveying water to the mouth? Or where is a person who does not understand the fitness of such vessels when presented by the hands of art? The want is simple and the response of art is perfect. The cup and the tumbler are not only light and beautiful, but they are constructed of materials which exert no deleterious or injurious influence upon the water, without which, in its comparatively pure state, life itself would be jeopardized.

The want is felt by all, but the office of responding to it is conceded only to a few whose mechanical skill and taste qualify them for the duty.

It is the natural right of any one to drink and to adopt any method of conveying water to his mouth he wishes, but this right he is perfectly willing to concede to those who supply him with the acceptable vessels used for such purposes. He surrenders the natural right to acquire a superior artificial convenience.

It requires a great deal of skill and ability to manufacture such articles, but everybody can understand their necessity or their adaptation to the uses for which they are made.

No one would be so stupid as not quickly to perceive the fact, did these vessels poison or

pollute the waters, which constitute the daily libations of life.

So, all mankind, actuated by strong social impulses and sympathy, recognized the necessity for the formation of government and laws.

It was easy to perceive that their intellectual tastes and enjoyments could be vastly promoted by an association of interests. To accomplish the objects of association, there must be concessions of those natural rights which all inherited; and of course such concessions could only be made upon a platform of mutual pledges of protection. A necessary and valuable consideration was given in exchange for a mutual interest, protection and relief.

The accomplishment of these objects was sought for through the organization of government and laws, upon so perfect a foundation that they would become the vehicles of unvarying and unpolluted justice and equity.

Justice and equity, because without these, association could not be maintained where a general surrender of natural rights had evolved the necessary obligations of mutual dependence, mutual sympathy and mutual protection.

What pure water is to the thirsty lips, so are justice and equity to all mankind in the formation of government and society.

After thus stating the premises upon which governments are erected, we hope to be excused if we declare, from the springs of misanthropy, that while all make the sacrifices or concessions in the contract, there are but few who are comparatively benefitted by the negotiation.

What government has secured an adequate and just protection to all of its citizens? At what era in the history of the world can it be shown that an adequate consideration, sympathy and protection had been extended to the poor?

Among what people, with which century, in what part of the universe, did civilization and government acquire a state of perfection so divine, so eminent and glorious that all were provided with the comforts and securities of life? These are grave and important questions which have been often asked, but never yet answered to the credit of the benevolence and sagacity of man, nor to the soundness, the justice and the practical equity of governments.

In an examination of the earliest written history of civilization that has ever been given to the world, the inspired and uninspired history of the Hebrews, with collateral references to the Assyrians, Phoenicians and Egyptians, nothing can be found indicative of a politico-moral condition, in which social equities were not violated; where the wants of the

poor were not only unanswered, but often mocked with indifference, where the piteous appeals of distress were not ever falling upon deaf ears and seeking in vain for the expected succor of kindly protection and fraternal sympathy—so much so, that sacred historians are often found recounting and rebrobing the cruelty and abuses inflicted upon the poor,—the insidious and oppressive treatment they received in their dependence and distress.

Moses, the greatest of law-givers, and Solomon, one of his most eminent and illustrious successors, are perpetually recurring, not only to the destitution, dependence and necessities of the poor, but to the inviolable obligations which require the rich and the favored to bestow upon them that kindness, consideration and fraternal sympathy which their hard and inequitable destiny demanded.

But in these governments, whose civilization seemed to have been evoked from the special instructions of the Almighty, whose laws were written in Heaven and transmitted through an effulgence of light and glory paralytically vivid, with whom the injunctions of benevolence were so ample, so specific, so sacred and severe, even with them, the principles of Charity, of mutual protection, sympathy and brotherhood were so badly manifested, that they became a source of Omnipotent reproach and national decay.

In the palmiest days of the Roman Empire, enthroned upon the highest eminence of national prosperity, interminable in authority, reveling in wealth and boundless in its political power—even here, the poor, instead of being the fostered recipients of an honest and equitable consideration, sympathy and protection, were mere machines in the hands of a favored few, to be employed, usefully, honorably, or to their own destruction, just as interest, caprice or pleasure suggested. But if the equities of social organization were so badly supported in the foregoing governments, what could be expected from them through the long and gloomy darkness of the *Medieval Ages*, where barbarism reigned supreme, and the loftiest political maxim emanated from the diabolical rule of “might against right?”

Nowhere in the records of government, from no annals of national life, nowhere along the historic pages of Heroditus, Arrian, Curtius, Livy, Plutarch, Sallust, Tacitus, Bede, Gibbon, down to the fresh printed works of Prescott, Bancroft and Macauley, nowhere amongst the accumulated annals of the wide world, can we procure the evidence of a single solitary government, in which the principles of mutual dependence, mutual protection and mutual sympathy received a development

which was becoming to the pretensions of government, or the commonest obligations of social compacts.

No traces of nationality that have ever yet made an impression upon the pages of history, can guide the exploring footsteps of a philanthropist to a government so perfect, so just, so equitable, so kind and powerful as to have been sustained in placing the *ægis* of adequate protection over all the aspirants of happiness, who contributed not only the original materials of which the government was composed, but the more essential, patient and forbearing countenance by which the authority and laws were sustained and perpetuated.

There is nothing in the history of the world, or the practical operation of government and laws, which relieves the masses of mankind from the stern necessity of organizing and sustaining systems of encouragement, protection, fraternizings and forbearance, superior to any of the provisions of kindness which the most benignant governments have ever manifested.

Something above finite government, something superior to finite law, something higher and holier than anything which has ever yet germinated from the incubations of authority or the fertilizing wand of politics, was and ever will be the demand of the human heart. In search of this something, mankind discovered that fixed element of the human mind, called the Religious sentiment,—a great moral element, which, whether evoked by Truth or Falsehood, was nevertheless, in either case, the resort of the whole human race when seeking for a source of sympathy, enjoyment and protection, that they failed to find in the forms and pretensions of governments, which they had erected.

Religion has been invoked in all countries, by all people, as a grand moral remedy for the numerous ills and iniquities which result from all legal compacts of social beings. Whatever idea Religion assumed, however exalted and perfect or groveling and absurd the theory upon which the function of religion was founded, it was nevertheless a powerful agent in promoting the relief and comfort of the masses who are the general sufferers from governments.

Religion did much in the way of inculcating the higher social duties and obligations. It infused a benevolent breath of equity, emotion and kindness into the precepts of law. It cultivated a spirit of forbearance with the masses without which governments could not exist. It was indeed a source of patriotic conservatism which extinguished the very elements of revolution and even sustained tyrannical

nies so monstrous that no time can efface their bloody and revolting record.

But then this grand natural, inspired remedy for the evils of society and government, though divine in essence, was not by any means divine in its social relations and tendencies. Though born of God, it was developed and disciplined by man. It became impregnated with error, acquired an ungovernable intolerance, sowed the seeds of prejudice, and harvested bigotry, superstition and unutterable cruelties. Instead of restraining injurious impulses, it enkindled the most desperate passions,—instead of cultivating peace and quiet and benevolence, it promoted disaffection, martyrdom and war. Fines, imprisonments, tortures, stakes and blocks, were invoked as means by which religion was to be made, not a disseminator of Truth, Love and Charity, but an iron rule of Faith, which must in its erratic movements predominate or die.

In its purity it was, as it must ever be, the strength, the counsellor and friend of the poor.

In error it was the curse of government, law and man. It paved the road to infidelity, opened the avenues of atheism and illustrated its power of destruction in the French Revolution of 1789. For a period of seventy-two years the government of France was but the reflex of the will and pleasure of a single man, the most successful absolute Monarch of the French people, if not of the world. In absolute display, in the immensity of wealth, in the gigantic concentration of political powers and the free exercise of an iron will, which would not and could not be restrained, it has scarcely a parallel in history.

But amidst all its splendors, underlying all its grandeurs, mingling with all its success and brilliance, there was a subdued wail of sorrow, sadness and starvation, rolling its ponderous weight over the hearts of the enslaved masses, which would have risen and destroyed the government and the despot who wielded it a thousand times, had it not been for the conservative power of religion over the passions and recorded grief of those who make governments, sustain and perpetuate them. Religion, and the endless collateral moral influences which it eliminates from society, imparted to the people such a degree of forbearance, such a spirit of submission, that even the lengthened tyrannies of Louis XIV, could not, or did not goad them into revolution and redress.

The rights of the many were completely usurped. The people were mere puppets in the ante-chamber of an arrogant despot's will. The kindness of legislative protection was denied them, the equities of judicial redress

were inaccessible between them and the privileged classes; the beneficence of executive clemency lighted not upon the dark and gloomy horizon of the injured masses.

Yet these masses were not unconscious of the unutterable wrongs which they were sustaining. It was the full knowledge of their wrongs that made the spear of affliction more poignant, as it was forever piercing their hearts and hopes.

But the restraining, forbearing spirit of religion, which is in its purity but the embodiment of peace, preserved them in their integrity, to so protracted a reign of tyranny and oppression.

From the death of this Monarch to the elevation of Louis XVI, an interval of fifty-nine years, the government of France seemed to have been turned over to the hands of those whose principle office was to spend the wealth accumulated, and destroy the government which preceded. Licentiousness, libertinism, tyranny, imprisonment, assassinations and decay mingled together to the destruction of religion, fraternity and decency.

Succeeding such a state of affairs, Louis XVI ascended the throne of France. He was a just man, a devout man, loved his country, sympathized with his people, and would have made a good King to better subjects; but the masses had now become corrupt. All those social organizations which are so salutary in restraining the masses—in evoking and refining the principles of fraternity and sympathy, were utterly abandoned. The Church had become powerless, and the sanitary religion of the masses perverted into atheism and infamy. The result was the blind, bloody, merciless, satanic revolution of 1789.

A revolution so infamous, so freighted with ignominy so dire and damning in connection with human beings, so stained with crime, so drunk with riot, so drowned in blood, that the wonder is that the light of heaven could ever again smile upon the country, or the countenance of God beam upon its people.

This revolution, which was born of insanity, reared in blood and died in infamy, is a deathless illustration of the fate of all governments, which neither seek the protection of their subjects, nor encourage the cultivation of those moralizing and fraternizing organizations which infuse the elements of mutual relief, protection and contentment into the minds and feelings of the masses.

Religion we acknowledge as the great moralizer of mankind—the great conservator of governments and a necessary source of present happiness and promise of future and unending bliss.

But whilst we thus acknowledge the function and moralizing power of religion, we must be permitted also to acknowledge that it is an element of the greatest excitability, and from time immemorial, one of the most pugnacious and merciless principles that has ever operated upon the destructive forces of government and authority. Whatever the creed upon which it was founded—whatever the light by which it is guided, it is ever ready to vindicate its claims in war to the knife, and the knife to the hilt.

For the maintenance and vindication of the crescent, it has revelled in blood and rioted with the expiring elements of suffering life, as if determined to pluck immortality from the brutality of indiscriminate slaughter. In the defence of the cross, it has violated treaties, corrupted governments, pillaged cities and murdered men, women and children by every device of torture which fiends could invent or demon spirits execute.

And yet pure and undefiled religion, is the loftiest, the grandest, the sweetest inspirer of peace, the truest fountain of justice, the choicest source of equity—the holiest, deepest, balmiest well-spring of governmental life and individual felicity.

Governments cannot exist without it. Authority moves by its light. Society breathes it as a necessary atmosphere. Man leans upon it as a staff of divinity.

But it is not the only agency which should be cultivated for the purpose of perpetuating governments and rendering them just and equitable in the administration of law. It is an impulsive, excitable and most uncharitable agency when mingled with human infirmity, which has lead off already in disloyalty to our own government, dissolved the bands of moral confederation, and violated the fraternal precepts which were inaugurated by the sires and sages of the revolution.

Here, in the free government of America, in that noon-day splendor of the Christian church, where temples of worship multiply as if evoked from the springs of magic, where architecture exhausts itself in the delineation of grandeur, magnificence, luxuriance and wealth; where sumptuous pews, capacious aisles, and variegated lights are too often used as bulletin boards for the complacent publication of prodigal and bankrupting fashions, even here, amidst such display of limitless riches, the sacred claims of the poor are unanswered; the piteous appeals of the sick unheard, the sinking heart of poverty-smitten bereavement unsupported, the sighs of the widow and the tears of the orphan falling to

the earth unrecognized by a Christian vision, unrelieved by Christian sympathy.

Something more is needed to cement and fraternize our people; something more is demanded in promotion of mutual protection, common, secular and effective benevolence. The church of the present day is not adapted to the poor. It has really and practically but little, if any sympathy with them. They are, in a secular sense, dead weights upon the prosperity of church organizations, and if cared for at all, they interfere too materially with that magnificence, luxuriance and pagantry by which the respectability of churches is so commonly estimated. We believe there is reason to fear that we cannot look to the Christian church to succor the poor. We speak it not with gladness; we name it because we believe it to be irrevocably true, and because we feel that the time will come when it will be made the source of momentous, if not bitter and hopeless regret.

Governments can not be looked to as an adequate source of protection to the poor. The President may go before the people annually, and luxuriate in that gilded exordium so universally adopted: "It is with joy and gratitude that I am enabled once more to congratulate the Government and people upon the universal prosperity, peace and plenty which abound in the land, through the smiles and favors of a munificent Providence, and the operation of free and enlightened laws." Governors may, for a brief period, step aside from the corrupting combinations and policies of politics, and in the captivating complacency of venerated sanctity, exclaim, per message, "We have reason to give our hearts to God in love and gratitude for the universal prosperity which has been enjoyed by our people." The Grand Juries of our Counties may write down that devotional conclusion, which is only deteriorated in interest because so often repeated, "In conclusion, the undersigned grand jurymen would call upon the people to praise God and all the County office-holders, for the practical benevolence of our government, as manifested by a universal prosperity, contentment and plenty. All interests are protected, business is everywhere flourishing, the poor are amply and generously provided for, the sick are given the best attention, the widows and orphans, and the blind and insane, are provided with comfortable homes and excellent attention. The prison cells are kept in charming order, clean, and well ventilated; the prisoners have good clothing, are well fed, and the police officers who go in and out before them are patterns of the sublimest morals, exercising the most tender and re-

formatory influence over the criminals. The hospital is in a condition never surpassed in our county. The number of its inmates is no less, but owing to the consummate management of the Superintendent and resident Physician, the expenses have been reduced about a third. These officers have established a rule, which we cannot too highly commend, that all persons applying for the benefits of this noble charity must bring certificates of good moral character, before they can obtain admission. From the application of this rule, scores and hundreds will be turned away, and thousands of dollars saved for a tax-ridden community."

Thus speak the functionaries of government from day to day, from year to year, from century to century.

And yet, there is no government in the world, no nation of the universe, in which men, women and children are not politically, morally and physically murdered by injustice, inequity, neglect and abandonment.

Something is needed beyond the provisions of government, the administration of law, or the practical sympathy and benevolence of the Christian church. Something which mingles the idealism of religion with the rough and rugged realities of human experience. Something which carries with it the halo of goodness, with which to smooth away the asperities of life and labor. Something so true, so kindly disposed, so vivid in perception, and so electric in impulse, that it studies not rank, nor wealth, nor plumage, nor power, but, God in heart and Charity in hand, walks the earth doing good, dispensing relief—*blessing* and being blessed.

Thus have we traveled, from man and society, to the necessity at least of active, practical, fraternizing associations—amongst which, Odd Fellowship has achieved a glorious and eminent reputation. While we would not claim for this institution an adequate relief from the ills and imperfections of social organizations of authority, yet we feel a glowing pride in recognizing its warm, and full, and vigorous hand in the warfare of life, supporting the weak and feeble against the rude and rough shocks of the strong and selfish. Most willingly do we concede to this frugal and benevolent Order that proudest of all claims, the claim of toiling, from day to day, and year to year, in the walks of the purest philanthropy, among the poor and needy, the distressed and destitute—a claim which springs not from the ideal beauty, or the poetic flourish of a fine wrought theory of "Friendship, Love and Truth," but which emanates, with golden ra-

diance, from human wretchedness relieved, from human misery assuaged.

The flowret robes of our Order are not constructed of the tinseled millinery of courts and mansions, but woven from the fragrant and beauteous blossoms of gratitude, fresh grown in saddened hearts made joyous, in bleak winters transformed to summer's smiles and warmth.

We cannot pursue a line of investigation or reasoning according to the plan we have to-day adopted, without being forced into the belief that the support and perpetuity of government, the progress and refinement of civilization, the reformation and adornment of the Christian church, and the general elevation and embellishment of human character, depend, in a most important degree, upon the successful formation of secular and independent associations of relief, fraternity and social equity.

Hence we say, in behalf of all associations of active human benevolence, ask not for gnady rank nor patronizing and condescending recognitions, but demand of government and society in general that measure of gratitude which an honest and generous heart exhales upon the hand of good neighborhood and brotherly kindness.

Respect, gratitude and support are the sacred rights of all such associations, be they Religions, Druidical, Masonic, Good Samaritan, Hebrew Benevolent, Hibernia Benevolent, Odd Fellowship, Foresters or Sons of Temperance.

Where the aim is to keep renewed the widow's meal, to magically increase the scanty loaves and fishes of the feast, to turn water into wine, and to substitute a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, there will be seen the substantial signs of a Divinity, recognized in Heaven, and worthy of the gratitude and admiration of mankind.

That Odd Fellowship is an order of this kind, with most exalted claims and eminent merits, will not be denied by any one knowing its true character. Any institution so constructed as to insure the most advantageous expenditure of its relief funds, lacks nothing but the funds to make it the gem of Heaven, and the glory of social life.

Odd Fellowship does not lack this important element. For forty-one years it has been steadily increasing its pecuniary capacity of benevolence, without the slightest abatement of the ardor, the zeal and enthusiasm which it inherited from the incubation of charity.

With its immense number of active representatives, diffused throughout the States and Territories of our country, sustained in every movement of fraternity and relief by an an-

nually accruing income of a million and a-half dollars, it walks before God and man as one of the noblest, grandest and most glorious institutions that ever sprang from the benevolence and ingenuity of the human mind and heart.

Its history is a beautiful eulogy upon effective fraternity and kindness—its works a glorious foundation of imperishable fame.

Where poverty tortures, where sickness racks, where bereavements prostrate, where widowhood and orphanage persecute with gloom and melancholy, there it is that it dis-

tils its gracious favors, as quietly as the gathering moisture of night, which settles in pendent gems of beauty and nourishment upon the leaves and flowrets of the field.

Thy office, gentle almoner of human sympathy, is the elevation of all mankind, not the enrichment and senseless luxury of the few.

“How few like thee, enquire the wretched out,
And court the offices of soft humanity!
Like thee, reserve their raiment for the naked,
Reach out their bread to feed the crying orphan,
Or mix the pitying tear with those that weep!”

[Rowe.]

